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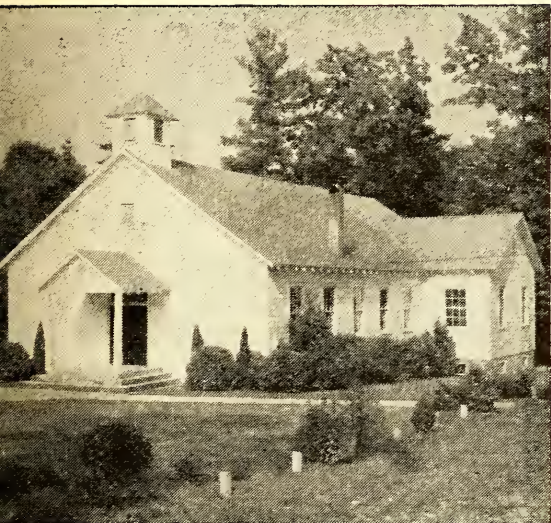
BEAVER CREEK BAPTIST CHURCH

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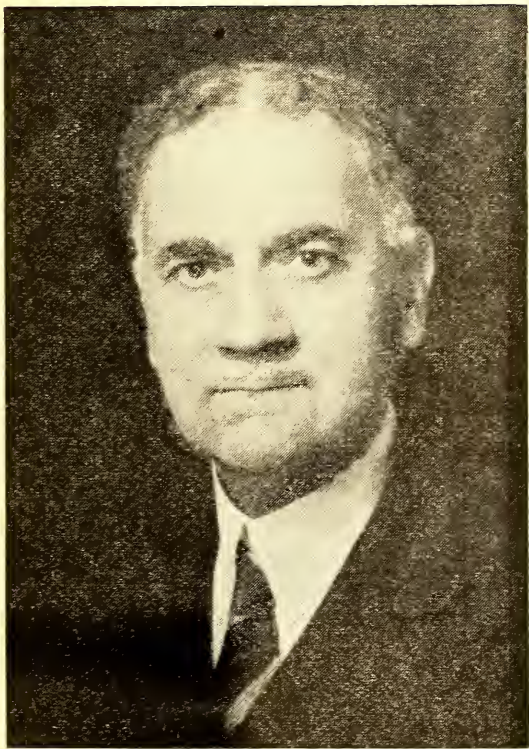
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BEAVER CREEK BAPTIST CHURCH,
Beaver Creek, N. C.

Founded 1779.



ROBERT H. McNEILL

**HISTORICAL ADDRESS BY ROBERT H.
McNEILL, ESQ., OF WASHINGTON, D. C.,
DELIVERED JULY 3, 1949 AT BEAVER CREEK,
NORTH CAROLINA, IN CELEBRATION OF
THE FOUNDING OF THE BEAVER CREEK
BAPTIST CHURCH, WILKES COUNTY,
NORTH CAROLINA.**

PASTOR WELLS, JUDGE HAYES, RELATIVES AND
FRIENDS:

We are met here at high noon on the Sabbath Day July 3, 1949, to celebrate the founding of a Church 170 years ago. This Church might well have been called "The Church in the Wildwood."

You have called me here to speak and I have come a long way, from the Capitol of our beloved Country, as a native son, to give voice to some thoughts upon the significance of this occasion, based upon its broad historical and spiritual values.

Perhaps the invitation and honor extended me to speak today is due to the long historical and spiritual connections of many of my ancestors with the founding, growth and development of the Church in which we are humbly worshipping.

I am deeply gratified to be here,—here in the very shadows of the hills, valleys and homes of my revered forebears, and of my own early life. Until I was about six years of age I lived at the "McNeill Place" nearby, and then moved to Wilkesboro, riding horse-

back from here, behind my father, to the County Seat, where he was then serving as your County Sheriff.

But I must not take your time talking about the insignificant part I played as a child in this fine community. I must speak to you upon the deep spiritual significance of the founding of this Church 170 years ago, and attempt to outline to you what its history, its memories, its traditions and the sacrifices of its founders and those who sustained it, by God's Grace, through all these generations, have meant to you and to me, to this community, to our native county, to this great State, and, broadly speaking, to the Nation.

We are really celebrating today an event which embraces, in its history, the entire life of our Republic. This fact alone marks this day one to cause us to pause and ask ourselves: Who established this Spiritual activity which has stretched its saving Grace over the greater part of two centuries and continued its beneficent ministrations to the people throughout all of the organized life of our beloved Country? And who, during these generations of much stress and strife, have kept it free to serve and save those coming under its influence?

As stated before, we are looking back over the entire history of our republic. This Church was founded four years before the adoption of the Articles of Confederation; three years after the Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776; eight years before the adop-

tion of the Constitution of the United States, and ten years before the Bill of Rights was approved. During the year of the Church's establishment George Washington and his little army of eleven thousand men spent the winter of 1778-9 at Valley Forge, suffering for the sake of liberty as no men ever suffered in the world's history. Your Church was established two years before the Flag, the Stars and Stripes, was adopted.

It was only two years before this Church was founded that Patrick Henry stood in Old St. John's Church in Richmond, Virginia and gave utterance to those immortal words—

“Is life so dear or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it—Almighty God! I know not what course others may take but as for me, give me liberty or give me death.”

During these same years, just prior to the founding of this Church, North Carolina patriots were assembling and declaring defiance to the British Government; conventions were held at Halifax, Newberne and in Mecklenburg, stirring the Nation in its desire for independence and national freedom. So you see that the efforts to build a Church in 1779 was undertaken right in the midst of a struggle for the creation of a Nation, free from British tyranny. It was a difficult time in which to undertake anything for the upbuilding of the spiritual life of a community.

Conditions of Life in 1779

When the founding of this Church was

undertaken, this was a primitive community. People traveled either on foot, by horseback or by covered wagon. The Indians were not here, so far as we know, but the Cherokees were a little further west and some straggling Indians still roamed through this section of North Carolina. Only a few years before Daniel Boone, the famous trapper and patriot, had established a little hunting lodge, or cabin, in this very area and had moved on into Watauga County and established the Watauga community in Tennessee and had moved on from there into Kentucky. He returned here about 1770 to see his people whom he had left behind.

Living was hard in those days. Everybody had to work with his hands, even teachers and preachers. Nobody had much money because there was but little in circulation. Little country stores were rare. Of course, schools had been developed only to a very limited extent. Teachers and preachers were always valuable assets to the community. Settlements were scattered, homes were humble and simple in their appointments, and the erection of a Church was one of the things that stirred the imagination of a community. Then, as now, everyone knew that the institution of a Church meant the uplifting of the people.

Under such conditions as here described, you will agree with me that it required courage to attempt to establish a Church. Members had to be called in for miles around.

Notwithstanding this, I am proud of the fact that my great-great-great-grandfather, Reverend George McNeill—whom I believe to have been one of the great church builders of this State—had the spiritual and moral courage and foresight to come here and lay the foundation stones of this Church, which now has had an uninterrupted history of usefulness, high-minded and courageous effort in the interest of civilization and religion for 170 years! He built more wisely than he knew.

After the Church was founded, it became a center for the spiritual life of the community. If it could tell the history of those who came to it and who were blessed by its ministrations, it would be a wonderful story. Here literally thousands of men and women have come into this Church and have gone from it into lives of usefulness. Here thousands of children have listened to lessons from the Scriptures and have become good citizens and honorable servants of State and Church.

Baptist Progress in 1779

Some here may not fully understand the struggle of our Baptist ancestors to secure full religious freedom, both of conscience and speech in this Country. You may be shocked to know that under our Colonial Governor Tryon, from 1766 to 1772, Baptists were subjected to real persecution. While Presbyterians—who had 1/10th as many members as Baptists—were permitted to join young

people in marriage, Baptists Ministers were denied that privilege. During the same period, in parts of the North Carolina Colony, preachers of our faith were brought to Court for reading and preaching from the holy gospels. No wonder then that when the Halifax Resolutions were adopted, protesting the denial of these sacred privileges, that Baptists were there demanding independence from Britain.

And no wonder, that large numbers of these aroused Baptists joined the Regulators, who, at the Battle of Alamance, fought the first battle on American soil, for freedom of religion and the right to live untrammelled lives. It was not strange either that after losing the Battle of Alamance hundreds of Baptists followed in the trail of Daniel Boone to the West. Tradition supports the belief that some of these Baptists may have settled in Wilkes County and some of them, or their children, may have helped to establish this very Church.

Historical Memorandum

What I have just stated is of deep significance. It shows the patriotic fervor in the hearts of our ancestors during this formative period in American history when a new Republic was being born. My revered ancestor, Reverend George McNeill, was so stirred by the events which were happening around him that during the Fall of 1780—one year after the founding of this Church—he was marching with the patriots from Tennessee, Kentucky, North Carolina and South Carolina

to the Battle of Kings Mountain, where American troops killed or captured the force of 1,000 men led by Lt. Colonel Patrick Ferguson of the British Army.

Many years after Rev. George McNeill had lain the foundation for this Church, my great uncle, Rev. James McNeill assumed the duties of its Pastor. He gave to it his abounding zeal and helped to keep its spiritual fires burning. Tradition has it that Rev. James McNeill left behind him sacred memories of duty splendidly performed. I wish I knew more about his life and services here.

About 100 years after the Church was founded, my father became the Church's Pastor. He was then a young man, 6 ft. 3 in. tall, a typical Scotch type, strong and of manly proportions. At an early age he had decided to preach. True, he had little education. The Civil War had made schools impossible. And my father grew to manhood during this great struggle. So determined was my father to get such education as the times furnished he attended two 2 months terms of "free" school, in this community, after his marriage to my beloved mother and three of my older sisters, then ages from 6 to 9 years, *attended the same school with him.*

But my father made up in zeal for souls what he lacked in learning. I hope there are some here today who can recall how he literally wept over seeing men go down the "broad road" of error and vicious living and depart

from the "straight and narrow path" of virtue.

I must leave to others to tell of the heroic services of other Pastors of the Church. I do not know of their work and sacrifices sufficiently to do them justice. They have built living monuments in your hearts. But after hearing Dr. Duncan's address on the history of the church delivered today, we can all exclaim "What hath God wrought" through the lives of His noble servants!

So strong was the faith of those who belonged to your Church, that even during the Civil War, when brother was often set against brother and churches divided on account of the issues of that regrettable conflict, this Church survived, and when that war was over, it rebuilt its spiritual and physical foundations and re-established itself in the affections and confidence of the people. It was then that my father, with others, kept the Church's spiritual lamps burning.

From the time of the services of my great-great-great-grandfather, who founded Beaver Creek Church, to the end of my father's connection with it as member and as Pastor, more than 150 years went by.

And now after 170 years I am permitted, as the great-great-great-grandson of the Rev. George McNeill, to speak in honor of his deeds of service and sacrifice. I speak reverently too of the devotion my father always had to the perpetuation, for all future years, of the work of this Church.

Perhaps I have said too much about my own

ancestors in their relation to the life of this Church, but I believe that was the purpose of your inviting me here. Not only is this meeting a Memorial to all the founders of this Church, but to its Preachers, and I spoke of them because I am connected with them by blood, and know more about their work and lives than of the other Ministers who did equally valuable service. All of these men were Godly men, who sacrificed their comfort for either no pay or minimum pay, because of their love of men. Each of them was correctly described by the Psalmist—

“But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in due season, his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.”

What of the Future?

What of the future in the life of this ancient institution, Beaver Creek Baptist Church? We must not be satisfied with only a past!

Surely, you have a foundation on which to build something magnificent to serve the future—economically, politically, morally and spiritually. You still have in your membership men and women of resolution, character and deep devotion to the principles upon which your Church was founded. I glory with you in this because here I had my beginnings, here my ancestors served God and

preached the Gospel of their Christ; here my people, as yours, grew to manhood and womanhood and went out to settle various parts of our country and to render *real* service for the noble causes of civic righteousness, religion and morality. Hence I shall always feel a deep interest in the progress of this Church.

Conclusion

This is the first time I have ever spoken from this platform, and it will probably be the last. It is a sad thought too, for many of us who meet here today will never meet again, until we meet in a better and holier world.

So, in a sense, this is a greeting and a farewell.

But to quote from a recent writer of a popular novel,—

“Life is eternal and love is immortal, and death is only a horizon; and a horizon is nothing save the limit of our sight.”

Here we see only dimly the significance of our acts but *There*, if we serve faithfully our generation, whether in humble or exalted stations, as did those who built this humble house of worship 170 years ago, we shall see Him face to face.

In view of all these great events you have a right to be deeply satisfied in your souls that you have kept the fires of faith burning over all these long years, through all the vicissitudes of American history.

In creating this center of religious faith

you also helped to build a center of individual liberty.

In building and perpetuating this church you have exalted the citizenship of your County and State. Besides, you have lifted the spirits of your people into an atmosphere of loyalty to the highest of all duties of citizenship: obedience to God.

One further word: *Our Country*, our State needs our services *now*. As never before these are indeed troublous times. Let each of us then, whether young or old, whether humble or exalted, live up to the inspiring lines of the poet who wrote of the man who craved immortal fame:

“I wrote my name upon the sand,
And trusted it would stand for aye;
But soon, alas, the reflux sea
Had washed my feeble lines away.

I carved my name upon the wood,
And after years returned again,
I missed the shadow of the tree
That stretched of old upon the plain.

The solid marble next my name
I gave as a perpetual trust;
An earthquake rent it to its base,
And now it lies o’erlaid with dust.

*All these had failed; I was perplexed;
I turned and asked myself, what then?
If I would have my name endure,
I’ll write it on the hearts of men.”*

It was in this spirit, my ancestors lived and served their God and Country and this Church for 150 years. May we humbly follow where they led!

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